

FEBRUARY 1975

MUNGER AFRICANA LIBRARY NOTES



28 THE FOUNDING OF THE
AFRICAN PEOPLES ORGANIZATION
IN CAPE TOWN IN 1903
AND THE ROLE OF DR. ABDURAHMAN

Dr. Richard van der Ross

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Subscriptions: \$10 a volume. Prices of individual issues vary, but the total cost of a year's issues is always in excess of the \$10 subscription price.

Business and editorial correspondence should be addressed to:

Munger Africana Library
California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, California 91109 U.S.A.

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Three Dollars Issue #28 February 1975

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FRONT COVER: Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman

Introduction

Dr. Abdurahman was an extraordinary leader of the Coloured people of South Africa, who today number more than 2,000,000 and are a majority of the citizens of Cape Town, South Africa's second largest city.

The Coloured people are largely Christian (mostly Dutch Reformed and Anglican), speak primarily Afrikaans, and culturally have been close to the Afrikaners, while their leaders, such as Dr. Abdurahman and Dr. van der Ross, have been strongly influenced by English values.

In a period of rapid political and social change in South Africa, the Coloured people are a litmus paper by which to judge the rate at which South Africa is moving toward a just society. However valid the "Home Land" concept may be for ethnic groups such as the Zulus in KwaZulu, the Batswana in BophuthaTswana, or the Xhosa in the Transkei, only a few political thinkers within the ruling National Party see the future of the Coloured community in terms of territorial separation. The Theron Commission, of which Dr. van der Ross is a member, reports to the government in 1975, and its recommendations may spark intensive debate on the status of this ethnic group. The historical background provided here gives an important perspective on the current scene.

This issue of the Notes is drawn from a 1000-page manuscript entitled "A Political and Social History of the Cape Coloured People 1880-1970." It was recently completed as a part of a study project at the University of Cape Town, Dr. van der Ross' alma mater. There have been numerous book length studies of the Cape Coloured community, but the manuscript mentioned is by far the most thorough, penetrating, and perceptive study. It represents tremendous work in digging out the minutiae of history from English and Afrikaans sources, and extensive personal interviews; it is a combination of erudition and judicious balance. We hope to publish another part of this definitive study in the future.

The author has been an esteemed personal friend of mine for almost thirty years, and we have often discussed the political history of the Coloured community in each other's homes in the

Cape and in the United States. I have not seen another South African more at ease in the different ethnic compartments so characteristic of contemporary South Africa. In the Cape when I have invited him to dinner parties with all Afrikaner guests (including members of the cabinet), he has been admired for the way he can turn an Afrikaans phrase. He is equally respected and listened to in white, English-speaking, liberal academic circles. And he is at ease and liked when the company consists of African leaders of diverse political persuasions. Dr. van der Ross, along with his father and mother, has long been among the most respected leaders within his own Coloured community.

Not unlike Dr. Abdurahman, van der Ross has had many careers. He has been an educator, including serving as principal of a teacher-training college and as a researcher in America and South Africa on early child learning. He has been an editor of numerous magazines and a newspaper, where he was equally adept in English and Afrikaans. He has been a life-long member of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. He has been an active politician and to my knowledge no word of corruption has been spoken against him. He was a member of the Molteno Commission which laid the basis of the Progressive Party, and has worked for the government in the Coloured education department. No man in the Coloured community has been more praised--or criticized--for being too militant or, alternatively, not militant enough. He has steadfastly hoed along a very rough furrow without rancor or bitterness. Yes, I have heard him resentful to the point of bitterness when he was the victim of racial discrimination; and not least when he was forced to give up his home under the Group Areas Act. Within the Coloured community, which has often been cursed in the past by pettiness and excessive divisiveness, his conscience has found him leading a middle group, critical of all discrimination, but never advocating violence. This is a position that leaves him vulnerable to attack from both a malefic right and an intransigent left, but it has earned him great admiration and respect from thousands of people of all races.

Dr. van der Ross is currently Rector of the University of the Western Cape. His post is analogous to that of Vice-Chancellor of a British university or President of an American university. As such, he is the first person in South African history not belonging to the ruling white oligarchy to be the head of such an institution.

These personal comments on Dr. van der Ross are important if his analysis of Coloured politics and Dr. Abdurahman's role in it are to be appreciated. Politicians such as Sonny Leon, Tom Swartz, and David Curry, Trade Union leaders such as Norman Daniels, and intellectuals such as Adam Small currently are playing important roles within and without the Coloured community.



R. E. van der Ross

But Dr. Abdurahman is unequaled in the history of the Cape Coloured people. Van der Ross more than anyone else in the present day has inherited Abdurahman's philosophical mantle. When van der Ross writes of the inevitable dilemma in which Abdurahman was caught at the end of his political life, he could well be describing his own leadership position in today's turbulent times of change. Dr. van der Ross may also become the victim of political circumstances. If so, no one realizes more acutely that, as was true with Abdurahman, "history demands these sacrifices."

Dr. van der Ross gave an introduction to this subject at a seminar in the Africana Library at Caltech in 1974. The version presented here is considerably expanded.

E.S.M.

THE FOUNDING OF
THE AFRICAN PEOPLES ORGANIZATION
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Early Political Organizations of the Cape Coloured

About 1900 or 1901, there would appear to have been a good deal of political activity among the Coloured community of Cape Town. Possibly this was due to the war, and it showed itself in several ways. First, there was the fact that a Coloured newspaper, the South African Spectator, could be maintained, containing for the most part news relating to the Coloured people and to political matters affecting them. Another newspaper, The South African News, also gave full coverage especially of political issues affecting Coloured people. It was White-owned.

Second, there was a group of men who took the lead in public matters and whose names keep recurring in the correspondence columns of the day--for example, F.Z.S. Peregrino, J. Tobin, Rev. F.M. Gow (of the A.M.E. Church), W.A. Roberts, W. Collins, W.J.D. Williams, H.O. Ally, and J. Curry.

Third, there appear to have been a number of political or semipolitical organizations. These include the following:

- (i) The Coloured Men's Protectorate and Political Association (of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope), formed in 1890 by F.Z.S. Peregrino;
- (ii) The Coloured People's Vigilance Society of South Africa (F.Z.S. Peregrino, Secretary); probably similar to, but not quite a successor of, the Protectorate and Political Association, and active about 1901;
- (iii) The Coloured People's Political Protection Association (President, W.A. Roberts), probably the same as that sometimes referred to as the "Coloured Men's Political Association";
- (iv) The Coloured League (Chairman, W.J.D. Williams);
- (v) The South African Moslems' Association, whose aim

was to promote the social, religious, and political interests of Muslims. At a special meeting held in St. Paul's Hall in Cape Town on 18 March 1903, Hadji Neamatollah Effendi was elected Secretary. He spoke at length on the need for education and deplored the deterioration of manners among Muslims. He took a cautious line in regard to politics: "In reference to political affairs, we are not in a position to interfere much at present...; we shall not bind ourselves to any party but we shall support the most progressive and fairest policy towards the Muslims." ¹

The Coloured people of the time displayed a lively interest in practical issues, both at the municipal level and at the level of the Legislative Assembly's powers. At the municipal level, the degree of consciousness and development had progressed so far by 1898 that in that year the first Coloured person presented himself (albeit unsuccessfully) as candidate for the City Council. He was Mr. Charles de Jager, who conducted a butcher's business at 72, Hanover Street, Cape Town. A contemporary newspaper article describes Mr. de Jager as being a worker in the Mission Field. Also, he had initiated "the Bill for [a butcher's] half holiday, and it is said that the gratitude of the butchers' assistants are due to Mr. de Jager, for his promptitude in organising an influential deputation to wait on the employers and prevented the threatened withdrawal of that concession." ²

Another Coloured person who came into prominence was Mr. Henry Thomas, who was named as a candidate for election to the Legislative Assembly in 1901. He is described in the contemporary press as "the Coloured man who has had the temerity to come out as candidate for the Assembly." He was "... not an educated man, still ... withal a practical business man who enjoys a high credit among the most influential business people and ... [is] popular with the majority of his people. [He] is an importer of boots and shoes and has a fine well-stocked shop at 50 Hanover Street." ³

It is possible that this is the same Henry Thomas who presided at a meeting of the "Coloured People's Association" in Cape Town early in March 1899. All that is known of this Association is contained in a letter to the Cape Argus, in the issue of 9 March 1899. The letter was written by one James Hoffman of Zonnebloem, a White person, who wrote in glowing, if patronizing,

terms of the meeting, which he attended. He said: "The Chairman, I am glad to say, was a Coloured man.... He addressed the meeting, using good language... and spoke for some time on economy. " 4

One of the objectors to Mr. Thomas' candidacy was Mr. James Curry, who said some scathing things about Mr. Thomas and was not even sure that a Coloured man should stand. "Are we not," he wrote, "living in a time in which we require every sympathy of the White?... Surely, every respectable elector will agree with me that there is no need at present to place one Coloured man in Parliament, and I openly say that unless we could place twelve men there, it is impossible that any good could ever be expected. " 5

The Great Plague of 1901 caused many White people to write strongly worded letters to the press protesting at having to share public transport--and even the sidewalks--with non-White people. Thus one L. Gordon wrote to the paper to "suggest to the Mayor and Town Councillors the advisability of strictly looking after [the "Kafirs"] also the Malays and the Cape Coloured people.... I was horrified to notice how dreadfully clutched up the Coloured people and Malays, etc., live in Mowbray.... Some of the wretched houses in the side streets contain dozens of these dirty wretches who eat, drink and sleep in one apartment... and then go round and sell to the householders in the neighbouring street.... " 6

One letter referred to representation made on this matter of the use of sidewalks by Mr. Peregrino, as Secretary of the Coloured People's Vigilance Committee (Society), to the High Commissioner, Lord Milner. It would appear that a police regulation had been issued in Johannesburg restricting non-Whites in the use of pavements. Peregrino had written to Milner to protest, and received a letter from Milner's private secretary, G. Geoffrey Robinson, pointing out that "His Excellency has made inquiry into the matter of the police notice to which you refer, and finds that, so far from its being designed to curtail the liberties of your community, it was actually issued to prevent interference in this respect with Coloured people of the better class. " 7

Education was a subject always very near to the heart of the Coloured people. Virtually all organizations, political or otherwise, mentioned educational advancement among their objectives, and the Coloured political leaders of the early 1900s

regarded educational issues as deserving their attention. Thus, for example, there was immediate and strong reaction to a circular issued in 1904 by Sir Lewis Mitchell, Acting Colonial Secretary, concerning such matters as compulsory education and the extension of technical and industrial training for European pupils of both sexes. "No reference to the education of Coloured pupils was made in the Circular," says Dr. E. L. Maurice, "and no alternative suggestions were presented to the School Committees for comment."⁸ There was "immediate response" from organized groups among the Coloured people. A deputation from the Coloured People's Vigilance Committee placed before the Government their objections to the implications of the Circular, and representations were made to Members of Parliament. A protest meeting was held in Paarl, and "a very large public meeting was held in Cape Town on 25 August 1904, at which the Malay and Indian communities were well represented, and which was supported by a telegram from Coloured leaders at Kimberley, expressing sympathy with the objects of the meeting."⁹

To some extent, the Coloured people also gave expression to their political feelings through a number of voluntary associations created, as Trapido says, by "the small lower middle class which enjoyed such high status among the Coloured people." He says, "There were cab-owners and cab-drivers associations, welfare, friendly, benefit and burial societies. There were a small number of co-operative stores, at least two Coloured diamond diggers' associations and a fisherman's association. A large number of thriving sports clubs existed, and also a number of Coloured masonic lodges and Coloured branches of the Y.M.C.A...." He adds that "probably the most important among voluntary associations, for providing a network of political activity, were the temperance lodges."¹⁰

John Tobin and the "Stone Meetings"

It was in this atmosphere of political interest that John Tobin started to hold his famous "Stone Meetings" at the top of Clifton Street, Cape Town, early in 1901. On 13 May 1901, Mr. Wilfred G.R. Murray, Private Secretary to the Colonial Secretary, Cape Town, wrote to Mr. Tobin, at 45 Hanover Street, as follows:

Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 7th instant to the

Colonial Secretary there is no objection to the meeting held by you on Sunday mornings so long as they are quiet and orderly.

In May 1901 we have a pamphlet, probably referring to the same meetings, saying:

Go to the
Coloured People's
MEETING
Sunday Morning
AT TEN
Learn Your Political Rights
Mr. H.O. Ally
and other speakers.
At the foot of the mountain
near St. Mark's Church
All are Welcome.

These meetings became an institution in Cape Town, a part of its life, with a very strong and direct influence on the opinions of its people. In a graphic account of the procedure at these Sunday-morning meetings by "A.D.D.," we get a description of the physical setting at the simple yet dramatic rocks, the Stones. "The 'Stone' is at the top of a circle of smaller stones. These smaller stones are the reserved seats. You must come very early to secure one of them. The space enclosed by them is vacant, but outside the circle are gathered some hundreds of Coloured men--Kafirs, Hottentots, Cape boys, half-castes. They are probably representative of every race."¹¹

"A.D.D." is evidently a Coloured person, and it is interesting to note that he uses the terms "Cape boys" (Coloured persons) and "half castes" without opprobrium. He tells of the meeting itself, of how "a man mounts the stone and the crowd gives him a fresh morning cheer."¹² The man is clearly, from the description, John Tobin, and we get a synopsis of Tobin's perennial line of argument. "His theme is national self-respect.... He traces the transition of the Coloured people to their present state. He is not satisfied with this state. It could be much better, he says, and it is in a measure the black man's own fault that it is so." Tobin goes on to explain how people of color should exploit their rights. But he points to what is, in his view, a grave deficiency: "He must not be ashamed of the colour of his skin; there is nothing in it to

incur shame or reproach. The black man who is ashamed of his race and people is still a slave. "13

Apparently the desire of certain Coloured persons to dissociate themselves from others and to lean towards European society was already at that time noticeable, as "A.D.D." tells us that "[Tobin] is merciless in his denunciation of Coloured men who for vanity's sake pretend to be of European descent. Such a thing is full of dishonour--mean and paltry--and tending to lower the status of the black races, which are a permanent constituent of the South African population. "14

Continuing, Tobin, the "Social evangelist," called for unity with the White people, and in particular with "the Dutchmen. " "... The Dutchman is our friend; we speak his language, he is our neighbour. I do not say that all Englishmen are not our friends.... They are those who are exploiting this country for the benefit of absentees.... They are the people who oppose the idea of a South African people, black and white, to govern themselves, and who do not scruple to take away our rights as citizens and electors. These are our enemies. "15

This synopsis of Tobin's theme is interesting. It reveals (a) his self-pride as a person of color, (b) his disdain of the "play-white," (c) his belief in the pursuit of one's rights by constitutional means, (d) his idea of an all-embracing South African nationality, irrespective of color, (e) his appreciation of cultural ties between Coloured persons and Afrikaners ("Dutchmen"), and (f) his disdain of those Englishmen who did not really regard South Africa as their homeland.

It is also clear that Tobin spoke of Coloured people as a distinct group, and when he said of "the Dutchman" that "we speak his language," he was clearly referring to Coloured persons, not to Africans. Yet, while Tobin differentiated between Coloured persons and Africans in population groups, the evidence does not suggest that he saw any difference in their political rights or destiny.

Establishment of the A. P. O.

The Stone Meetings were the original political forum of the Coloured people of South Africa. However, the need was felt for an organization with greater stability than these Sunday meetings

could provide, and a group of men decided to form the African Political Organisation, or A.P.O. In September 1902 a letter was addressed to members of the Coloured community telling of the formation of the A.P.O. and inviting people to join, to form branches, or to seek further particulars. The letter was signed by W. Collins, W. Stemmet, P. J. Eksteen, W. Carelse, P. Arendse, and W.A. Roberts. It is noticeable that John Tobin, originator of the Stone Meetings, did not sign this letter; some of his differences with its signatories had already begun to show.

As a result of response to this letter, no doubt, "a large and representative meeting was held in the Mechanics Institute, Claremont [Cape], " on September 30, 1902, "by the Coloured portion of the community for the purpose of starting an organisation to be called the 'African Political Organisation,' and which had for its object the unity and banding together of the coloured races in South Africa. "16

The Chairman, Mr. Collins, spoke on the need for the 200,000 Coloured people to have some representation in Parliament. He said that "the members of the Assembly seldom stood up for, or even pretended to stand up for, the Coloured races. "17 Their votes were asked for at elections, said Mr. Collins, but that was all. Although the law at that time permitted the election of a Coloured man to the Assembly, Mr. Collins "did not contend that they should have a Coloured man to represent them but he hoped that when the time comes they would choose a man who would look after their interests. "18

He deplored class legislation, for instance, in regard to housing and liquor; he denounced gambling, drinking saloons, and brothels. He stood by the Constitution, saying that "the man who tried to take their constitution from them would not get the support of the Coloured people. "19 He appealed for more education, equal to that given to White children. And he appealed for unity. "He asked them for once and for all to join the organisation, to unite and work strenuously for the good of the Coloured people. "20

Mr. Collins then put forward the objectives of the proposed new organization as follows:

- A. To promote unity between the Coloured races of South Africa.
- B. To obtain better and higher education for our children.

- C. To defend the Coloured people's social, political and civil rights.
- D. To get the names of all Coloured men who have the qualifications to be registered as Parliamentary voters on the voters' list at the registration of voters.
- E. The general advancement of the Coloured people of South Africa. ²¹

The response to the call of Mr. Collins and others must have been very encouraging, and in March 1903 the A.P.O. held its first annual conference. In his Presidential Address Mr. Collins said: "This is the first time in history, that we as a race are meeting together to discuss our own affairs,"²² and spoke of "...so many noble representatives from the various towns and villages of our beloved Africa present here this evening."²³ He referred at many points to "our race" and clearly meant the Coloured people; he said with pride that "...the Government of this organisation is in the hands of our own race...", although he referred to an opinion, apparently then current already, that an organization run by Coloured people could not last long.

The following are among the main points made by Mr. Collins at this historic meeting:

- (1) The A.P.O. set out "to create a unity amongst us."
- (2) Education was seen as the key to success "...a poor education will always keep us poor."
- (3) The A.P.O. did not seek social integration with White people: "...we don't want to get into company where we have no business, we do not crave social intercourse..."
- (4) The A.P.O. would not fight other political organizations: "...since we have been so often sold and re-sold, we cannot afford to support any particular party..."
- (5) Class Legislation (i.e. discriminatory color legislation) was opposed: "...it is unjust, as it is unfair, as an instance: see the Brothels act, one of the clauses defends the White woman against the Black man; but what about the Black woman? She is left helpless and defenceless."
- (6) The people were ever to be elevated, and so: "Let us fight the drink traffic, it has wrought havoc amongst our people..."

In one form or another, with varying emphasis, these points have resounded through the political history of the Coloured people to the present time.

The A.P.O. rapidly became the most representative and most powerful political organization of the Coloured people. During the thirty-five years of the Presidency of Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman it grew to have no fewer than 225 branches in all parts of the Union and South West Africa, although it would be difficult to say what its maximum number of active branches, or its maximum membership, was at any one time.

It later adopted the name African People's Organisation, when it felt its function to be less political and more of the nature of a welfare organization. It has not been possible to find exactly when this change of name occurred, but from existing evidence it was about 1919. Although the name changed, the initials A.P.O. remained.

To a great extent, the political history of the Coloured people, of the A.P.O. and of Dr. Abdurahman, to the time of his death in 1940, were inextricably interwoven, although the influence of the A.P.O. diminished after the mid-1930s.

Matt Fredericks and John Tobin--
Early Leaders of the A. P. O.

When the African Political Organisation was founded in 1902, its first secretary was Peter Eksteen, but in 1903 the secretaryship passed into the hands of Mr. Matthew Jacobus Fredericks. "Matt," as he was generally known, remained a leading figure in the A. P. O. and in the political and social affairs of the Coloured people until his death in 1936. Indeed, it was Matt Fredericks, who, in 1905, induced Dr. Abdurahman "to enter the field of politics and champion the cause of the Coloured people."²⁴ And at his graveside "his most intimate friend," Dr. Abdurahman, said: "Fredericks lived a life which was an inspiration to me, and which largely influenced my public career. He had no personal object in working for his people. He did not make his welfare dependent on that of others. There was no hope of reward or glory for him in this world, and yet he sacrificed everything in the prosecution of the task which promises happiness to the general community."²⁵

If Abdurahman relied so much on Matt Fredericks, it was because of the latter's undoubted ability and shrewd judgment in the political arena. He took his politics seriously and his skill in this field was recognized well beyond the Coloured community. At his death, one commentator wrote: "As organiser of the A. P. O. Conference and assistant to parliamentary candidates, he had a shrewd ability. It was generally thought that many of our present M. P.s owed their position to 'M. J. F.'s' knowledge of the 'inside of politics.'"²⁶

Matt Fredericks was born in Cape Town in 1874, but in 1906 he went to live in Johannesburg. At that time he was already secretary of the A. P. O., but as he received an honorarium of only £50 (R100) a year for this work,²⁷ he had to do some other work as well. Thus he worked as an insurance agent, and in 1915 was appointed Superintendent of the African Life Insurance Company. When Matt Fredericks went to the Transvaal in 1906, he found that there were already the signs of political interest and activity there. The Coloured people of the Transvaal were concerned about the discussions which were being held about the coming Union, its constitution, and the place which they would occupy under it.

Indeed, it is rather ironic that the A. P. O. devoted a great deal of its activity in its early years to the Transvaal, feeling that

the Coloured people in the North had fewer political rights than they in the Cape enjoyed. Professor J.S. Marais says, "The most important political activity of the A.P.O. in its early years was undertaken on behalf of the Coloured inhabitants of the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony." ²⁸ In the Transvaal and Orange Free State, the Coloured people had no political rights at all, and the Constitution of the old South African Republic (1858) stated that "The people desire to permit no equality between Coloured people and the White inhabitants, either in Church or State." ²⁹ The Orange Free State constitution (1854) "defined burghers, who alone possessed civil rights, as 'White persons.'" ³⁰

Fredericks unquestionably took a leading part in the political life of the Coloured people of the Transvaal from the time he got there. And so, when Abdurahman led the first South African Coloured People's Delegation to the British House of Commons in 1907, he (Fredericks) represented the Transvaal Coloured people. In 1909 he again went on deputation with W.P. Schreiner, Abdurahman, and others.

For the last ten years of his life (1926-1936), Matt Fredericks was Organising Secretary of the A.P.O. and gave even more of his time to the Organisation. He was an untiring and able worker, entirely devoted to the cause of uplifting the Coloured people, completely loyal to his leader, Dr. A. Abdurahman. He is regarded by some as the first outstanding Coloured political leader.

But if any one person were to be singled out as being, more than any other, the moving spirit responsible for the founding of the A.P.O., that person must surely be John Tobin. As we have seen, Tobin was the founder of the Stone Meetings, and there can be no doubt that these meetings nurtured the spirit of political interest, discussion, and criticism which culminated in the founding of the A.P.O. Although Tobin's name does not figure among the signatories of the letter of invitation which convened the first A.P.O. meeting in 1902, he was present at that meeting and spoke in favor of the proposal to establish the Organisation.

John James George Tobin was the son of an Irishman who settled in Port Elizabeth and later moved to Kimberley, taking his family with him. It was in Kimberley that John got his first ideas of politics. An eloquent speaker, Tobin was also an avid reader and was well able to interpret the politics which he read for the less sophisticated listeners of the Stone Meetings. He was a man

of strong conviction--note his Irish heritage!--and was not easily detracted from a path once he had chosen it.

Politically, Tobin was not quite consistent, although nationalism remained an ideal of his. He split with the A. P. O. early in its history, being expelled in 1905, the year in which Dr. Abdurahman became President. He never returned to the A. P. O., and was refused when he tried. He would probably never have been able to work with Abdurahman, as Abdurahman wanted the A. P. O. for the Coloured people only, and Tobin--at that stage--wished to see a broader non-White membership. In any event, the two men were both temperamentally too strong for amicable cooperation.

John Tobin was a colorful and forceful person who would have become a political leader in any age and in any community. Taken all in all, South Africa and the Coloured people particularly were fortunate in that he espoused the cause of the Coloured people at a time when few were able to grasp the issues and give a lead. He differed from Matt Fredericks in that he could not agree with Abdurahman. In fact, seen across the years, the Abdurahman-Tobin differences seem to have been an early polarization of Coloured political opinion into the familiar White SAP-NAT camps.

Matt Fredericks, being of the same political tradition as Abdurahman, allowed himself to be eclipsed in public life and leadership by the better educated, more assertive Doctor whom he hero-worshipped; but Tobin, a leader in his own right and leader of his kind of politics at the time, developed in another direction. Although Abdurahman was to occupy the center of the political stage for the next four decades, the work of Fredericks and Tobin as pioneers should not be under-estimated.

Dr. Abdurahman's Policy as Reflected in his
Presidential Addresses to the A. P. O.

Abdullah Abdurahman was a born leader. With his ancestry it would have been strange if, in any community, he had not risen to leadership; placed as he was in the Coloured community of Cape Town at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was almost inevitable. Although his grandparents were slaves, they were not ordinary slaves; they were said to be "worthy of respect." They had acquired their liberty, and the grandfather must have been a businessman of great ability, since he was reported at one stage to have had more than ten thousand pounds (R20,000) in the bank. Abdurahman's father had studied theology at Al Azhar University; he himself studied medicine at Edinburgh.

Family influences and education, then, were combined with the enterprise of the East, the broad humanitarian principles of the religion of Islam, and the scientific knowledge of the West. Added to this were the personal qualities of his mother, a great beauty, and of his Scots wife, Nellie, who had both charm and force of character.

Abdurahman was not the first Coloured person to practice medicine in Cape Town; that distinction goes to a West Indian, Dr. Jackson. But Abdurahman certainly was the first person possessed of all the qualities of high intelligence, good education, rhetorical ability, broad outlook gained from travel, a fervid love of the Cape, amounting to nationalism, and a sense of identity with the underprivileged, born of his brown skin.

We have said that while Abdurahman would have been a leader anywhere, his leadership was the more assured in the Cape at that time. This is because, in so many respects, especially that of professional qualification, he towered so far above the rest of the Coloured community. Even today, nearly seventy years later, there are still so few doctors among the Coloured people that they are accorded much higher prestige and honor than are their fellow doctors in the White community.

With this background, then, and with the stirring political events of the day, it was not strange that Dr. Abdurahman entered public life and became a member of the Cape Town City Council in 1904. For thirty-five years, he was the leading figure in the politics of the Cape Coloured people. He was the main policy-maker,

the chief negotiator, and the principal spokesman. His political vehicle was the A.P.O., of which he was the President from 1905 to his death in 1940, and the political highlights of those years were his Presidential Addresses, delivered at the annual conferences of the A.P.O.

Although there is no reason to believe that the Presidential Addresses were official statements of policy, or that they had been submitted to the executive committee prior to delivery, they became "official" statements because they were generally received with acclaim and were not challenged. Other bodies, notably the Teachers' Organisations, were to follow this pattern later, not always with happy consequences. That the addresses of the President could be so received and so regarded was entirely due to the prestige of Dr. Abdurahman. He towered above the rest of his organization in intellect, education, personality, and eloquence, and when he had spoken, the A.P.O. had spoken.

The "annual" conferences were not, in fact, held regularly every year. Abdurahman did not consider it necessary to call a conference each year unless some really important matter had cropped up. The A.P.O. had branches in all four provinces, the distances were great, and the people were poor; he did not wish to call on them needlessly to make the sacrifice of coming to a central, national conference. Ruling the A.P.O. autocratically and unchallenged as he did, Abdurahman did not need frequent conferences to decide policy; he decided it. Indeed, it could well be that he would have considered too frequent conferences a hindrance rather than a help.

In addition to Abdurahman's overseas education, his marriage to a Scotswoman and his constant contact with White persons in local government and in other affairs in Cape Town gave him an acquaintance among, and an easy relationship with, White people. He had as well a readiness--even an eagerness!--to attack White persons who publicly supported discrimination, which few Coloured persons of the time possessed, but which many admired and applauded.

Twelve Presidential Addresses have been traced; it is possible that there were more, but these twelve are certainly adequate to indicate Abdurahman's political thinking and to define the major issues of the day as seen by the country's most active, most voluble, and most publicized Coloured politician. Moreover,

the Addresses enable us not only to see something of his personality, but also to assess his role in the development of the A. P. O.

The 1906 Address (Cape Town)

At 11:20 a.m. on 2 January 1906, Dr. Abdurahman rose to deliver his first address as President of the African Political Association in the Bethel Institute, Cape Town. It must have been quite an occasion. Cape Town is a gay place on 2 January, which has traditionally been the Coloured people's day, their "second New Year." It is mid-summer, and for the season there are plenty of visitors who come to the coast, to the Mother City, to their friends, to see the "Coons' Carnival," and generally to participate in the happy spirit of the "big days."

And among the visitors were many who had come for this special occasion; Coloured persons who had come from three Colonies (Natal was not represented) to hear the vigorous, learned young President outline the policy of the growing A. P. O., on which so many pinned their faith. Besides Abdurahman were many whose names were well-known in their home-towns and beyond as doughty fighters for their people's rights. These included A. P. O. Vice-Presidents D. Lenders (Kimberley) and J. January (Johannesburg), and Executive Officers N.R. Veldsman, T. McKrill, and P. Smeda (Cape Town), J. Daniels (Johannesburg), N.J. Daly (Bloemfontein), and, of course, General Secretary Matt Fredericks.

True to the spirit of the times, Abdurahman made great play of the British connection. It was a noble, high-sounding note, and gave great scope for his oratory. He loved to play on the theme of British justice, British fair-play, British promises made, the British tradition, and so on. Not only are these lofty ideas in themselves, but their oratorical value was greatly increased whenever instances could be quoted--and there were many--of these principles being violated. In the resultant cheers, cries of protest, sounds of applause or whatever the appropriate response from the crowd, Abdurahman and his followers found great satisfaction, and into these responses they no doubt read the signs of organizational strength and eventual victory.

But Abdurahman was wrong in one vital respect, and it was an error that was to prove fatal to many other Coloured political

leaders who, wittingly or unwittingly, followed the A. P. O. President in this. Abdurahman never realized the extent to which the British diplomacy was empirical in its approach. He did not appreciate that they, the British, could state one broad principle, unassailable in itself, yet connive at practices within the general pattern which did not measure up to the moral standards expressed on the grand scale. When he came up against these instances or practices, he did not explain them in terms of empiricism, but condemned them roundly in terms of dishonesty. This approach to the problems of politics has been an important--if unfortunate--part of Abdurahman's legacy to Coloured politics.

Abdurahman was speaking to people who had hoped that Britain's defeat of the Dutch Republics in the Boer War, and the Coloured people's participation in the war on the side of the British, would bring about relief to their position, especially in the Northern Colonies. In this they had not only been disappointed, but they were now alarmed to see that the Northern Colonies, unrepentant on Colour issues, were approaching Responsible Government.

He spoke in strong terms. He spoke of "the political life or death of the Coloured people." He asked, "...were [the Coloured people] satisfied with the prevailing [political] conditions, did these inspire them with hope for the future?" And he answered: "An emphatic 'NO' must be given." Attacking Britain for not alleviating the position, he claimed that 84 percent of Britain's 400 million colonial peoples were governed "in a more or less despotical manner."

He also attacked the Dutch of the Northern Colonies, originally the Voortrekker Republics, on whom he poured great scorn: "A small but unfortunately powerful section of the men in the North had returned to the days of slavery"; "If [people] wished to see to what excess despotism and power to rule led, when inhumanity and ungodliness were walking hand in hand through the country, they should go to the Orange River Colony and Transvaal."

Mindful, even in these early years, of the value of education, Abdurahman referred to the recent Education Act of 1905, reminding his audience that "When the Education Act was before Parliament, it was said that European children should be compelled to go to school, because the Coloured children going to

school were getting too numerous. The black bogey did its work. "

But Abdurahman still retained some affection for, and hope under, the Cape Constitution, even if only so that he could contrast it with the North to which, he said, one must go "for relentless despotism. " Amid cries of "Sorry we did, " he reminded his audience how they had fought on the British side in the belief that after victory their Coloured brothers in the North would be fairly treated. He slated Lord Milner for allowing Coloured people to be treated "like the barbarous native, " and gave instances of ill-treatment of Coloured persons in the O.R. Colony "where one could see what despotism was and what the brute part of man can do. " Abdurahman never tired of attacking the North, especially the O.R. Colony. To him, Free Staters were the worst, and he used his most vitriolic language to describe them.

He concluded his address with a little homily, exhorting the Whites to forget race pride and to do justice. The Coloured people, in turn, were advised to be "honest, truthful, and, above all, patient, because their cause was a good and true one. " He advised them not to spend their lives in matters concerning themselves only, but in matters of interest to others. They should unite and be firm, and above all, educate their children, and in the end justice would be done to them.

Although this first Presidential Address of Dr. Abdurahman was by no means his most momentous, in many ways it set the pattern of succeeding ones, and it indicated his line of political thinking.

1. Abdurahman at all times fought for the political rights of the Coloured people--that they should be equal to those of White persons not only in the Cape, but in all the British colonies.
2. He was particularly distressed at the political disabilities of the Coloured people in the Northern colonies.
3. As time passed, he began to see his prophecies that the illiberalism of the North would affect the Cape come true. To this he reacted violently.

4. He had a deep sentimental attachment to the British flag, to British sentiments, ideas of justice, and so on. He could criticize the contravention of these ideals so violently because he believed in the principles so strongly.

5. He took it for granted that the Transvaal and the O.R. Colony, having fought the British, were basically anti-British. If, therefore, the British ideals were basically admirable, it followed that the Boers were basically despicable. He found justification for this view in the "no equality in state or church" policy of the North.

6. From the premise of the basic inhumanity of the Boer, he was led to despise the institutions of the Boers. In the first Address he attacked their laws, and queried the sincerity of their Christian faith; later he was to pour scorn on their language (Afrikaans) as it developed.

7. At all times, Abdurahman argued his people's case from the aspect of principles and morals. He seldom spoke in terms of political or economic pressure, although in a few speeches the possibility of economic boycott--to be effected by withholding labor, together with the Africans--was mentioned.

8. The reference to the Africans ("barbarous natives") is curious. Abdurahman was inconsistent in this matter. He clearly drew a distinction between the Africans and the Coloured people, and one cannot escape the conclusion that he would--at least at that stage--have accepted rights for the Coloured people in the North even had these rights not been extended to Africans. Possibly his assumption that the Africans in the North were more "barbarous" than those in the Cape enabled Abdurahman to make his distinction with a clear conscience.

The influence of this first Presidential Address is also seen on public speech-making among the Coloured people throughout Abdurahman's lifetime and later. For example: the use of English as the language of the politician became established for at least the next fifty years; the high-sounding, declamatory note

became the norm of the orator and the joy of the listener; the moral appeal was constantly made; the practice grew in Coloured organizations of "Presidential Addresses" in which speeches on this pattern would be made; and finally, such occasions developed a kind of sanctity, and it became generally accepted, until well after Abdurahman's death, that in a "Presidential Address" one could say pretty well what one liked. Even the authorities seemed to allow considerable latitude on such occasions.

One important undertaking arose from the 1906 Conference, i.e., the submission to King Edward VII of a petition with respect to the political and civic rights of the Coloured people in the Transvaal and the O.R. Colony. This action fitted in perfectly with the regard in which the Throne, as well as British institutions and justice, was held. Abdurahman drafted the petition, for which the Conference duly thanked him.

The petition, drafted by Abdurahman, traced the history of the franchise to Coloured persons in the Cape Colony, a franchise that had at no time been abused. It pointed out that similar rights were not enjoyed by Coloured people in the Transvaal, and that this had deprived the Coloured people who had emigrated from the Cape to the Transvaal of their rights. Clause 11 of the petition says: "Deprived of these rights, Your Majesty's Coloured subjects are deprived also to a great extent of the means of publicly ventilating and obtaining redress by constitutional means of any grievances they may suffer from which, though grievances, are not such as can be rectified by recourse to a Court of Law. "

The petition went unheeded, but there is again one allusion to the Africans of which we must take note, and which is linked to Abdurahman's reference to Africans in his Presidential Address. Clause 12 draws this distinction: "Your Majesty's petitioners are aware that the terms of the Conditions of Peace signed at Vereeniging on 31st May, 1902, provide that 'the question of granting the Franchise to Natives will not be decided until after the introduction of Self-Government,' but they humbly submit that this condition has reference only to aboriginal natives, and not to such coloured subjects of Your Majesty as Your Majesty's petitioners claim to represent. " Here Abdurahman, and the A.P.O. as led by him, makes a considered statement and a distinction between Coloured and

African (Natives) is explicitly made.

The 1907 Address (Oudtshoorn)

At the Annual Conference of the A.P.O. held from the 7th to the 10th of January 1907 at Oudtshoorn, Abdurahman at once reminded his audience that color discrimination still existed in the North and that this was the reason for the Conference being held. He was very conscious of the rights of Cape citizenship, and although he was critical of the lack of educational facilities, "They had...something to be proud of in the generosity of comprehensiveness of their constitution which made no discrimination between man and man on account of the colour of his skin."

He dwelt for a considerable time on education, pointing to the need for adequate training. The system of education by mission schools was, he said, antiquated. Nor would the Coloured people be satisfied with "Industrial training." Here Abdurahman shows a clear bias towards academic education, and his influence probably had a great deal to do with the later bias of many Coloured people towards academic learning, although he admits that the majority need a more practical form of education. He pleaded for free and compulsory education for all, pointing to the political advantage as well "...no matter what [the Coloured people's] claim might now be to the right of the franchise, political or civil, the higher they were educated the stronger became their title of those rights."

The indignities to which Coloured persons were subjected in the Northern colonies were again roundly denounced, and the resultant injury to "British prestige" deplored. He instanced some of these injustices and referred to the British betrayal of the rights of the Coloured people--along with those of the Africans--at the Treaty of Vereeniging.

Abdurahman, speaking in 1907, very soon after the Peace of Vereeniging, must have remembered clearly the expressed intentions before, and the reality after, the Treaty, and he showed great bitterness as a result. The word "natives" in Article 8, he said, was never intended to include the Coloured people. "It was clearly the meaning that [Article 8] should apply to naturellen, not the Coloured people, and Lord Milner had plainly given that as his explanation of the terms; yet now it was made the excuse for

excluding them [the Coloured people] from the franchise." 31 Repeatedly the British were criticized for having gone back on their word.

Abdurahman then moved to a question that was already looming large, that is, some form of federation of the Colonies. The Coloured people, he said, looked on the matter with suspicion, "for they did not know what would come out of the mill." He referred to the assurances of Dr. Jameson "that there would be no tampering with their rights in [Cape] Colony," but he was nonetheless uncertain of the part to be played by the North. Still, Abdurahman seemed to have no real fear that the rights of the Coloured persons in the Cape would be diminished, as he asked for the Northern Colonies to be penalized in any future Federation should they continue to deny the franchise to persons of color. He concluded his Address with an exhortation to the people to "Educate yourselves and your children, be honest and be truthful, be united to our noble cause, and you will reap the reward of doing your duty."

The 1909 Address (Cape Town)

When Abdurahman delivered his 1909 Presidential Address to the A. P. O. Conference in the Socialists' Hall, Cape Town, he was fully aware that the major issue was the coming Union of the four Colonies. Union itself was not opposed; indeed, Abdurahman said of it that "...we all regard [it] as eminently desirable." But once again he was concerned at the possible color-bar clause in the Constitution.

The position was now more critical than before. Whereas in previous Addresses the concern had been with the rights of the Coloured persons in the North, it was now clear that the rights of those in the Cape were also threatened in terms of the Draft Constitution, then under consideration by the four Colonial Parliaments. "That Constitution," said Abdurahman in his Address, "will affect our future vitally. It contains clauses which deal specifically with the political rights of all men of colour."

In the Address, he retraced the Constitutional history of the Cape Colony since 1842. He went on to remind his audience that, when Representative Government was eventually granted to Cape Colony in 1852, the Duke of Newcastle had written: "It is the earnest desire of Her Majesty's Government that all subjects at the

Cape without distinction of class or colour, should be united by one bond of loyalty and a common interest, and we believe that the exercise of political rights enjoyed by all alike will prove one of the best methods of attaining this. "

Having reviewed the happenings of fifty years previously, Abdurahman went on to deplore the fact that a color-bar was envisaged for the Draft Union Constitution. His chief objection, he said, was that it was not British. He expressed amazement that the Cape Parliament, held in such esteem by the Mother Parliament, could acquiesce in the color clause, and said that the light of freedom was being extinguished in the Cape Colony. He repeated his fear that the Coloured people of the Cape would be reduced to a state of "slavery" and "political helotry" as in the Transvaal and O.R. Colony.

One notable aspect of Abdurahman's 1909 Address is that he asked his audience, at the beginning, "...when he used the term 'Coloured person' or 'person of colour' to understand that he meant everyone who was a British subject in South Africa and who was not a European (Cheers)." It is likely that Abdurahman was forced by circumstances to look beyond the Cape Coloured community, as the threat in the Draft Constitution was to all persons of color. He realized by this time that it would be folly, even suicidal, to plead only for Coloured persons, and hence we find no reference in this Address to the distinction claimed in previous Addresses between "Coloured persons" and "aboriginal natives. "

The 1910 Address (Port Elizabeth)

The 1910 Conference of the A.P.O. was held in the Odd-fellows Hall, Port Elizabeth, in April. Abdurahman must have found himself in a difficult position here. Whereas, at the 1909 conference he had denounced the idea of proceeding with a Constitution which contained the color-bar clauses, these were now pretty well a fait accompli: the South Africa Bill had already passed its final reading in the British Parliament on 19 August 1909 and the country was poised for the Union to be proclaimed on 31 May 1910. The deputation of Coloured and African delegates to London had gone and returned, and the cause had, they thought, been lost for the time being. Time was to show that it had been lost for a far longer period than they then believed. This conference was,

then, a momentous one in that it was the last in which the delegates of the A.P.O. would meet as representatives of different Colonies. "In future," said Abdurahman, "we meet as representative inhabitants--some of us citizens with somewhat curtailed political rights--of the Union of South Africa."

Once again Abdurahman took his stand by "British principles" and deplored the color-bar. But he seemed also, possibly for the first time publicly, to acknowledge that the cause lay deep in the prejudice of White to non-White, and he faced this wall of prejudice with little to offer as a counter-measure. "There is a mighty mass of prejudice against us which we must do our best to remove," he said. But how to remove it? His only reply was the general, almost pathetic, "We must convince the people of South Africa that we are not only as men entitled to political rights, but that we are just as well qualified to exercise these rights as those of the privileged class.... We must prove to the world that character and conduct are not the exclusive possessions of white-skinned people, but that these qualities are independent of the colour of a man's skin, and based on other foundations." Taking, then, as his theme the question of "Character Building," with grand oratory Abdurahman exhorted the people to lead good lives, to "shun all evil practices, to surround their children with good influences especially in their early years." He explained at some length that morality had nothing to do with skin color. "Give all [races] the same environment, the same moral atmosphere in their early years, and the same morality would be attained, no matter what the colouring of the skin."

But now Abdurahman returned to the question of the African vis à vis the other population groups. "The whites [of South Africa] need not fear any attempt of the blacks to mingle in their social world." He went further and postulated a form of "separate development" for Africans, while insisting on a separation of African and Coloured interests. "The black races," he said, "must be allowed to develop in their own way. Their views of improved civilisation may not agree with European standards. But as we, however, meet as an organisation of the Coloured people only of South Africa, the discussion of that point is somewhat outside my province...it is my duty as President of the A.P.O., on the present occasion, to deal with the rights and duties of the Coloured people of South Africa as distinguished from the native races."

A visitor to this Conference was the African, Dr. W. B. Rubusana, later to be the first person of color in the Cape Provincial Council. The usual greetings were exchanged, Rubusana conveying the good wishes of the South African Native Convention, and expressing "...his conviction that there should be more co-operation between the coloured and native people," and instancing the labor question as one suited for such united action. In replying, Dr. Abdurahman endorsed "the view that the Coloured and Native people should amalgamate in political matters, and fight together for the welfare of all the Coloured people."

This again seems to show that Abdurahman did not have clarity on the question of Coloured and African people. Two points seem to emerge at this stage. First, he did not believe in total organizational unity or amalgamation. Second, he did not believe in social amalgamation. The manner and extent of the "amalgamation in political matters" to which he refers were left vague and were very much a matter for later clarification as events developed.

[The earliest years of the founding of the A.P.O. and Dr. Abdurahman's role in it ends at this time. Dr. van der Ross continues his detailed analysis of Dr. Abdurahman's Presidential Addresses. For the purposes of this Note, however, only a brief summary of each is included. -Ed.]

The 1912 Address (Johannesburg)

Dr. Abdurahman reviewed the country's problems, and said that they were three in number--language, nationality, and the Native problem. He asked how antagonisms could be avoided and lasting peace established. He called for a change of heart on the part of Whites towards persons of color. Coloured children should be allowed to enter White schools, and Coloured persons should worship in the same churches as Whites, he said.

The 1912 Address was a notable one. For the first time Dr. Abdurahman really showed fight. True, many of his previous speeches were strongly worded, but they resolved in the end into skilful oratory based on moral precepts and principles. Here Abdurahman, having lost the constitutional prizes which he had sought by these means, became more concrete. He spoke in terms

of the labor laws and of specific instances of discrimination affecting the people's livelihood. At many points he did not distinguish between Coloured and African, and specifically called for some form of alliance between the non-White groups in order to obtain redress for grievances.

The 1913 Address (Kimberley)

Speaking with heavy sarcasm, Dr. Abdurahman referred to the disappointments and setbacks which the Coloured people had suffered during the period of Union. He reviewed these events, going back to pre-Union days, from the Coloured man's point of view. Abdurahman addressed himself to the Coloured people, urging them to learn from their bitter experience.

The most notable feature of this Address is that Dr. Abdurahman continued his attack on White people and their integrity and laws. Second, he declared in even stronger language than before his loss of faith in White people. Third was his call to the Coloured people to close their ranks. The call was not yet clearly thought out, but the notes which were struck were to sound again later: organization, passive resistance, strike, and action. Fourth, there was the more positive call to the Coloured people to achieve in terms of education, trade, industrial effort, and the acquisition of land.

The 1919 Conference (Cape Town)

Between 1913 and 1919 no A.P.O. Conferences were held. It is possible that World War I brought about a recession in organizational zeal. In his 1919 Address Abdurahman again reminded the people of past grievances, and speculated on such rewards as wartime loyalty might bring. Abdurahman opened his Address by referring to the ruthlessness of the war and to the ideology of "irresponsible force" which had inspired it. He spoke with optimism of the newly-formed League of Nations, calling it "an attempt made to secure that better land of hope where a spirit of human brotherhood will replace the bitter competitive spirit of the past." This was, then, a post-war Address in that its main emphasis fell on the Coloured people's war effort and their resultant hopes and expectations. For the first time too, owing to the war, there was a sense of internationalism.

The 1921 Conference (Cape Town)

This was not one of Abdurahman's great Addresses. A

great deal of time was spent on his well known aversion, the treatment of the Coloured and African people in the Orange Free State. Dr. Abdurahman was clearly of two minds in this Address. On the one hand, he spoke strongly of non-cooperation in industry as the only means of securing political redress; on the other he still had hope of a change of heart on the part of the Whites. On the matter of non-cooperation, he did not speak at all of any form of organizational unity with Africans.

He ended this Address on an optimistic note, hopeful that the political position of the Coloured people was about to improve. He spoke of efforts which the A. P. O. would make "in the near future" to have the color-bar removed (the presentation of a petition to Parliament to ask for the color-bar clauses to be removed from the South African Act), and he evidently had a great deal of hope that these efforts would bring relief, if not complete success.

The 1923 Address (Cape Town)

By the time Abdurahman delivered this Address, his hopes had again faded, and we find him once again retracing the early history of the non-White peoples with bitterness and acrimony. He divided the period subsequent to the Anglo-Boer War into three events: (a) from the Boer War to the inauguration of Union (1902-1910), which was characterized, he said, by the great betrayal of the Coloured races; (b) from Union to the Great War (1910-1914), which was the period of the loss of political rights in the Cape at Union; and (c) from 1914 to 1923, which opened with the Great War, during which the Coloured people served with loyalty and distinction, 25,000 men forming the Cape Corps. But the war was no sooner over than "...our women, not only native women, but Cape Coloured women also of respectable family and parentage, were flung into the vile prisons of the Free State and subjected to inhumanly harsh treatment... What a disillusionment of all our hopes!"

The President of the A. P. O. now turned to education, noting that some effort was being made in the Cape, but again deploring the low expenditure on non-White education in the Northern provinces. He concluded, "...it seems to me that we have little hope of securing the blessings of education until we have gained our political freedom."

The 1929 Address (Cape Town)

When Abdurahman gave his Presidential Address on 1 April 1929, General Hertzog had been in office five years. It was this five-year period that Abdurahman chose for his subject, with the purpose of determining whether the Coloured people had, during that period, progressed in their economic, educational, political, and spiritual life. After criticizing the various Coloured Person's Rights Bills of 1926, 1927, and 1929, Abdurahman declared that "the Coloured man has made no progress during the past five years to reach a higher status and to live a life conforming to European standards. "

The 1935 Address (Cape Town)

When Dr. Abdurahman rose in the Cape Town City Hall to present his A.P.O. Presidential Address on 22 January 1935, he was not very old in years, but he was not well, and clearly showed the effect of some thirty years of active and continuous campaigning. The tone of his opening passages was that of a man who has stood in the front line of the fight for three decades, and not made happy by victory but rather heavy with setbacks. It was as a tired fighter that Abdurahman started out to review the past ten years, the 1924-1934 period, or the period since General Hertzog had made "his famous pronouncement, that the Coloured people should be placed on a footing of equality with Europeans -- educationally, economically, industrially, and, of course, politically. "

Abdurahman had on many occasions spoken of the importance of economic advancement, and once again he referred to the relation between people's education and their economic position. He reflected that in the 10-year period "a White Constitution has been granted to South West Africa and votes have been granted to White women, " but not to Coloured women. The Adult Suffrage Act had further weakened the Coloured vote. He blamed these evils on race prejudice, saying, "The wrongs we suffer, political, educational, economic, are all founded in race prejudice, which is the curse of any Society. " He appealed to the young men and women at the Universities to bring about a change; he also appealed to the Coloured people to build their own character and to foster education.

Abdurahman did not offer any solutions in this Address, beyond the rather piously expressed hope for a change of heart.

He did not speak, as in previous years, of economic boycotts or of passive resistance. He referred to the motivation and the effect of the labor laws as stated and, rather in the manner of a tired statesman, he left it there.

The 1939 Address (Cape Town)

On the evening of Tuesday, 11 April 1939, Dr. A. Abdurahman rose in the Cape Town City Hall to deliver what was to be his last Address as President of the African People's Organisation. He was clearly disillusioned, disappointed, even embittered. His opening paragraph began: "The age of chivalry, tolerance and kindness has passed away, and an age of fear, of unreasoning suspicion and of the blind prejudice which is the deformed offspring of the union of these two has usurped its place. True learning is in course of liquidation; fresh, constructive, far-sighted and dispassionate thinking is at an awful discount, and mere lip-service is being paid to the great principle of love already so distorted by racial bias, that its original purity and simplicity can no longer be found or even recognised. It is in this dreary atmosphere that we, the representatives of the Coloured people of South Africa, meet together here today."

After a brief call on the Coloured people to act honorably and to be loyal to their country, Abdurahman proceeded to launch an attack on the Dutch Reformed Church. He traced the history of the Coloured people's rights once again. He spoke in condemnatory terms of the industrial and wage legislation, the Wage Board, the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, the Wage Act of 1925, the Apprenticeship Act. He took a brief look at the system of law enforcement, which he found to be discriminatory: "...Innocent and inoffensive Coloured persons are often brutally assaulted by the police for no proper reason whatever, except, perhaps, for having congregated on the pavement, and even then without causing an obstruction to the pedestrians." He took another look at segregation, on which he blamed all these ills, decrying the idea of racial purity and denouncing its protagonists.

Abdurahman reminded his audience of all the many wrongs to which the Coloured people were subjected, and asked whether White South Africans would continue with their ways, or "listen to the voice of Christian charity and redress these grievances." He appealed for just treatment and racial harmony, addressing his

plea specifically to "White South Africans who still believe that God is in His Heaven, the parliament, and the Dutch Reformed Church. "

Dr. Abdurahman cautioned the people to be ever vigilant. The A.P.O., he said, had taken up the cause, and was doing its best in their interests. "I close...this address," he concluded, "upon a note of hope that, in spite of everything, we shall yet win through. "

[Dr. Abdurahman died on February 2, 1940. His portrait hangs in the Cape Town City Hall, in commemoration of his long and distinguished service to the city. -Ed.]

The Influence of Abdurahman's Addresses

We have now closely examined the major political speeches of Dr. Abdurahman and, therefore, the major political speeches affecting the political and cultural development of the Coloured people during the period 1905-1940. We have also taken note of some of the criticism and reaction in the contemporary White Press, and we have in passing given further comment on some of the matters raised in the A.P.O. Presidential Addresses.

An analysis of the Addresses shows clearly where the main emphasis fell over the three and a half decades. This was on the franchise, and it is perfectly understandable that it should be so. Abdurahman regarded the franchise as the key to economic growth and to cultural development, and he regarded the loss of the full franchise in the Cape as the greatest single blow to the advancement of the Coloured people. He never tired of stating his opposition to the color-bar which was written into the Union Constitution in 1909; he never changed his opinion that this is where matters started to go wrong.

Allied with this protest went his attacks on the British for having permitted the color-bar to enter the Union of South Africa Act. He lost no opportunity of quoting chapter and verse to show how the British had broken faith, and he examined (and condemned) all other constitutional proposals in later years in the face of the basic loss of the franchise in 1909.

The analysis shows, next, that the topic second in the order

of frequency is that of Labour. This reflects Abdurahman's awareness of Labour, work and earnings as fundamental to a people's well being. And in this respect his major quarrel was with the legislation and trade unionists who erected and operated barriers in the field of industry. Abdurahman was not a trained economist, and at no time do we find him entering into economic theory, nor does he approach the Trade Union movement from the classic point of view, considering the pros and cons of collective bargaining or the issues of employees in relation to employers. He was concerned only about the non-White, especially the Coloured worker. It was easy to see the simple fact that non-White workers were being underpaid and were in addition being squeezed out to accommodate the White worker.

And it was as a campaigner for the rights of the non-White worker that Abdurahman saw the unhappy effects of the "Civilised Labour Policy" on his people. Once having seen it, it became his duty to proclaim and attack it wherever he could, and it was a duty which he did not neglect.

Third in the frequency-list of Abdurahman's topics is Education. Apart from his own academic background, his work as a Provincial Councillor, with education as a main function of the Council, would have provided the motivation in this matter. As an M.P.C. he had access to official sources and statistics, which he used with telling effect to show up the weakness of the education provided for Coloured and African pupils vis-à-vis that provided for Europeans. He was also able to make another type of comparison between educational expenditure on non-Whites in the Cape, on the one hand, and in the Northern provinces on the other. As the Cape eclipsed the North in this respect, Abdurahman could speak here with some pride. The topic of education always provides good debating material. In the first place, there were statistics available to support the case of discrimination. But then, too, education was a matter where the merits of the case did not need to be defended. Especially with the Coloured people, who already placed their faith for their children's future so heavily in education, the appeal was powerful, and Abdurahman knew how to use this aspect of his campaign to the best effect.

His interest in education also gave him the opportunity of displaying some of the positive fruits of his political work, and this must have been the source of much satisfaction to him. There was, for instance, the establishment of Trafalgar High School,

Cape Town, and Livingstone Secondary (later High) School, Claremont. There was the acceptance at the University of Cape Town of Abdurahman's protégé, Harold Cressy, who in 1911 became the first Coloured graduate. There was the establishment of the Teachers' League of South Africa, led by Cressy, which served as the professional body in the educational field to supplement the A. P. O. in the political field. All of these must have given a great sense of achievement to the campaigner who saw nothing but set-backs on the political front.

The conditions under which non-White persons lived in the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony (later the Orange Free State) come next on the list. This topic was Abdurahman's pet aversion, and he fulminated against these conditions at every opportunity. It gave him great scope for his scathing sarcasm and biting criticism, and he could evoke much feeling from an audience when he touched on these matters. As time passed, he used these arguments and illustrations less, realizing no doubt that the possibility of the political movement going back to the situation of earlier Cape days, was receding. He had, in other words, regretfully to see his own prophecies in regard to the Southward shift of Northern prejudice come true. This topic also gave him an opportunity of showing his deep dislike and distrust of the Afrikaner, with whom he never really felt at home. His sympathies were with the British, whom he understood, and although he felt betrayed by them it was also only in the later years that he came to accept that the age of the Union Jack and of the kind of loyalty Queen Victoria had received, was past.

The question of race relations was a favorite topic of Abdurahman's, and he made frequent reference to it. When he spoke of relations with Whites vis-à-vis the other race-groups, he consistently warned of deteriorating relations, while he pleaded for an improvement via the lifting of the color-bar.

When speaking of Africans, he did not directly speak of race relations, seeming to assume that non-Whites naturally got on well together. There are, however, two aspects of the race question which seem to need further mention. The first is Abdurahman's reference to the Africans in 1910 when he suggested that the African should see to their own problems, and that the Coloured people should be considered separately. This is not consistent with his general attitude to Africans.

The second is his very consistent attack on Afrikaners, in relation to whom he had few kind things to say. It is true that he found it possible to speak in reasonably kind terms of General Hertzog when Hertzog was Prime Minister, but generally he reserved his most acid comments for Afrikaners, especially of the Northern provinces. Not only was this so for Afrikaners (with the notable exception of J.H. Hofmeyr), but he also spoke in a very deprecating manner of the Afrikaans language and the Dutch Reformed Church.

It must be conceded that he had great provocation from the Afrikaner, in view of the politics of the North, and it is probably also true that in the light of his own educational background he cannot be blamed for the associations which he made in regard to language. It is also the case that the Dutch Reformed Church took a strong segregationist line in the 1930s which could not but draw Abdurahman's unfavorable comment. But seen purely as a question of race relations, it is also true that Abdurahman's comments were not likely to win friends among the rising Afrikaner Nationalists. And in the same way Afrikaner Nationalism was likely to associate the remarks and attitudes of Abdurahman with the Coloured people generally as, indeed, they were probably entitled to do.

The emphasis of the other main topics of Abdurahman's Addresses fell on segregation and racialism, which he attacked in principle apart from his criticism of specific instances, on economic advancement (which he at all times saw as basic to other matters), on social indignities suffered in public places, and on the loyalty of the Coloured people in times of peace and war--a loyalty which unfortunately went unrewarded.

Finally, there were his speculation on the future and his calls to the people to look to themselves. He remained an optimist to the last, albeit sometimes an embittered optimist. But his faith in the people, in youth, in the righteousness of his cause and in education as a means of compelling greater recognition in the future, remained. And he never failed to conclude his addresses with exhortations to the people to live good lives, to be honest, to shun strong drink, and to lead exemplary lives in spite of the persecution and hardship to which they were subjected.

Dr. Abdurahman's A.P.O. Presidential Addresses have been described as the major political addresses affecting the life

of the Coloured people from 1905-1940. But their influence went beyond the lifetime of their author. Abdurahman's style became the style of Coloured politicians and speakers who copied him in his lifetime and continued to do so after his death. For decades later, even to the present time of writing, the style of Abdurahman could be recognized in speakers where the Coloured leaders addressed their audiences.

There was the love of the well-turned phrase, the resounding rhetoric, the quotations, often of lines of verse, and the recourse to Biblical sources. It is noticeable that where Abdurahman made a religious reference, it was always from the Bible, never from the Koran, which could be because his appeal was addressed so largely to Whites. Abdurahman's love of history and his use of history to support his case also became a favorite practice of speakers, although this later dwindled as historical perspectives were lost. As it dwindled, it became supplanted by his other great theme, that of suppression and oppression. This, indeed, became the great cry of the years following his death. And with it, there was the bitter attack on the roots of oppression, which became an attack, held by Abdurahman as by his successors, on prejudice and on the White man as a symbol of oppression.

Abdurahman taught the Coloured people, among other things, that it was possible to stand on a public platform and criticize the White man, his laws, and his ways. For this the Coloured people loved him and lionized him, as they, the ordinary folk could not on their own speak publicly in such terms, of the White people on whom they were dependent for their living. But Abdurahman was independent, and he could--and did--speak out. So he became their mouthpiece, their alter ego, and their hero. And, as a body of public speakers emerged in the years from the thirties onwards, also in some ways able to speak out, they followed the pattern set by Abdurahman, his hard-hitting criticism, his outspoken, aggressive attack, his call to moral principle as the norm, his scathing personal remarks on occasion.

It became the fashion for the speaker to attack the authorities (which was often legitimate and justified) and even to attack certain individual White members of central and local authorities (which was not always justified). It will always be a matter of conjecture whether Abdurahman, by setting this pattern, or his successors by following it, served their own cause in the best possible way.

In addition, Abdurahman was influential as a public speaker in that he always spoke English, his command of Afrikaans being slight, as was his respect for that language. Again, by his example, he set a pattern, and the use of English as the language of politics and public life for the Coloured people became so entrenched that it was only in the sixties (if by then) that Afrikaans became accepted as the language of organizational life for most Coloured organizations.

But by far the most important effect of Abdurahman's Addresses and, indeed, of his whole public life, was political. He opposed color discrimination. He opposed segregation. He would have opposed apartheid or separate development had he lived long enough to meet these terms as representing political policies. He fought these matters where, as he believed, the root lay: in political discrimination and in the withdrawal of the full franchise from the non-White people of the Cape, together with its denial to the non-Whites of the North. He saw with clear insight how the lack of political power would lead to discrimination in other spheres--in occupation, in wages, in education, in housing, in social matters.

After Abdurahman had laid the foundations of the Coloured people's political aspirations, other organizations in his own time and after followed. No Coloured organization claiming to be political, and in any significant way accepted by or influential within the ranks of the Coloured people, has departed from the basic principles of opposition to race discrimination. No organization whatsoever has emerged--or dared to emerge--with the aim of second-class citizenship or of acceptance, as an ultimate aim, of segregation, apartheid, or separate development.

Abdurahman came on the scene just when the glimmerings of education were beginning to take effect, when the people were beginning to realize that education could really elevate them and do more for them than just basic literacy, as was true in the pre-1900s. Abdurahman himself, as a qualified doctor born of non-White parents in this country, was living proof to the people of the validity of their belief in education.

There is usually a need for people's aspirations to be defined and articulated for them. This not only crystallizes their views, but develops them, and they become more conscious of

just what they want. It matters not so much that the goals are distant; the defining of those goals and the defining of the barriers to the goals give the people hope. It is easier to fight a seen enemy (and to imagine him conquered) than to deal with an unseen, undefined enemy. The people needed a leader, and Abdullah Abdurahman was that leader. He had the further quality, as time showed, of keeping to his principles, when leaders like John Tobin defected, and his public denunciation of the defectors added to his stature and strengthened his following.

Yet, while Abdurahman kept to his principles, he remained a realist. He remained convinced, to the end, that if he was to serve his people who so desperately needed to be uplifted, he had to be in a position of influence. For this reason he entered the Provincial Council in 1914. The purists might have argued that, being denied entry into Parliament by the South Africa Act, he should also have refused to sit on the Provincial Council, which was a creation of that Act, and in a sense, a palliative to those deprived of the full franchise. But Abdurahman saw that as a Provincial Councillor he would be in a position to do much, especially for education and, believing in the value of education as he did, he took this opportunity to serve.

Paradoxically, it was this very eagerness and preparedness to serve, this dedication to the cause of his people, that was to lead to the eclipse of Abdurahman as a political figure. For his constant association through the City Council and Provincial Council with White politicians drew him inevitably into their intrigues. Being a politician, he had to play politics himself. But he was handicapped in that he represented a group without the necessary money or property to exert a strong, direct, and immediate influence on the major political groups of the country.

His was, therefore, the path of compromise, although not on the public platform. Inevitably there developed a situation where the platform principles of Abdurahman appeared to differ from his political actions as shown by his political affiliations. It is part of the irony of the situation that Abdurahman fell foul of the very forces which he nurtured. The very schools for which he fought, the very education which he fostered, produced the young men and women who were to be his critics.

The labor and political organizers embraced a social and political philosophy different from that of Abdurahman, but popular in the economically desperate years of the thirties. When these forces, which included his own daughter, Mrs. "Cissie" Gool, came to demonstrating their own strength, there came also a clash with Abdurahman who found himself in the more conservative camp. This opposition of views led to direct confrontation of a kind that must have grieved Abdurahman deeply. An instance is the public meeting held in Cape Town in April 1938 when Mr. Morris Alexander stood as United Party candidate in the Castle Division. Dr. Abdurahman was on the platform in support of Mr. Alexander, this being his (Abdurahman's) stronghold. Yet neither Alexander nor Abdurahman was accorded a hearing by the 400 voters who packed the hall. Both speakers were shouted down. The audience's cry was "We want Snitcher" (the Socialist candidate who eventually lost) and "Down with colour-bars." The newspaper reporting the event, rightly stated that this was "a strange experience for the Doctor in District Six." ³²

The declining influence of Abdurahman in the face of the rise of other, more militant forces is introduced as a reminder that Abdurahman's influence did not go unchallenged in his lifetime. Hopefully it also clearly shows that at this stage Abdurahman was caught in an inevitable dilemma, and that the criticism and abuse which descended on his head was not necessarily the result of personal weaknesses. He was the victim of political circumstances and history demands these sacrifices. That he had to pay the penalty does not, however, diminish his stature as a political leader of his time and as a prophet for the future.

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